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MAJORITY LEADER

Ways and Means Committee

Chair, Revenues Subcommittee



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SPONSOR TESTIMONY

House Bill 1031 - Natural Resources - Land Conservation - Establishment of Goals and Programs (Maryland the Beautiful Act)

Chairman Barve, Vice Chair Stein, Members of the Committee,

Shortly after taking office in 2021, President Biden and Vice President Harris announced the America the Beautiful initiative. Their proposal commits the nation to a goal of conserving 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030. This bold goal recognizes that a healthy environment is essential for a healthy population. Conservation mitigates the impact of climate change, expands access to outdoor recreation, and protects habitats to prevent extinctions of plant and animal species all while keeping our home beautiful.

Since the announcement of this national goal, state and local partners have thrown their weight behind this effort. Across party and geographic lines, Nevada, Florida, California, Maine, Michigan, New York, New Mexico, Illinois, and Hawaii have all established their own 30% conservation goals. House Bill 1031 provides Maryland with an opportunity to join these states and become a leader in this effort to conserve land. This legislation establishes a 30% land conservation goal by 2030 and a 40% goal by 2040. This 40% goal would make Maryland a leader in the nation for conservation efforts that will be vital as we continue to combat the existential threat of climate change. The bill tasks the Smart Growth Subcabinet with coordinating interagency efforts to achieve this goal and publish a plan to do so by July 2023 and every 5 years thereafter.

In order to expand the tools needed to achieve these goals, the bill also creates two new programs: the Local Land Trust Revolving Loan Program and the Greenspace Equity Program. The former provides land trusts with access to a revolving loan to quickly purchase and conserve land in Maryland. The Greenspace Equity Program provides grant funds to purchase and maintain greenspaces in areas without access. The goal of this program is to enhance the public health and livability of underserved areas by ensuring that every community can access greenspace and weigh in on its development.

Lastly, the bill provides \$1 million annually for the Mel Noland Woodland Incentives and Fellowship Fund. This will fund a program to directly and indirectly increase tree plantings in communities around the state. This will bolster efforts to clean and protect the Chesapeake Bay as well as mitigate the threat of climate change.

This legislation came together after months of work with conservation stakeholders and environmental advocates. House Bill 1031 is our chance to make a lasting impact on land conservation in Maryland and as part of a national effort. I thank the Committee for your consideration and respectfully request a favorable report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Eric Luedtke".

Delegate Eric Luedtke